



# EK BOOKS

## TEACHER NOTES & RESOURCES

**Title:** Tabitha and the Raincloud

**Subtitle:**

**Author:** Devon Sillett

**Illustrator:** Melissa Johns

**Publisher:** EK Books

**Price:** ANZ \$24.99 | USA \$18.99 | CA \$24.99 | UK £10.99

**ISBN:** 9781925820133

**Publication date:** Mar 2020

**Audience age:** 4 - 9

**Key Curriculum Areas:** English, Humanities, Health, Arts



### SYNOPSIS:

Tabitha has woken up on the wrong side of the bed; there is a lone raincloud which won't leave her alone! She tries to go about her daily business (eating, going to school, learning and creating) but no matter what she does, the nasty old raincloud keeps pouring on her!

At first, Tabitha is seriously grumpy about this and isn't afraid to share her annoyance with everyone around her. However, as the day wears on, Tabitha realises that like most problems, there is a solution here; she just has to find it. And find it she does!

The story resolves with Tabitha making the best of her challenging day with satisfying and positive results.

### THEMES:

#### Resilience

Tabitha models how to cope with a challenging situation. Importantly, this story doesn't get rid of the problem, but instead depicts a strong female character coping and overcoming in the best way possible.

#### Problem Solving / Persistence

Tabitha has an obvious challenge; a raincloud will not leave her alone. The solution is not so obvious and she does not come to one immediately; most of us don't when faced with difficult situations. However, eventually Tabitha does find a solution. Despite feeling upset and despite the raincloud's persistence, Tabitha is also persistent and head-strong; she finds a way to celebrate and have fun despite the challenging circumstances in which she finds herself.

#### Bad Moods / Difficult Days

Though the story has a positive outcome, it is important for children to see and learn that it is OK and acceptable to feel grumpy and sad sometimes – sometimes there isn't even a clear reason why we might feel this way. Tabitha models this in a constructive way.



# TEACHER NOTES: Tabitha and the Raincloud

## THEMES (cont.):

### Family

Tabitha is depicted with her family in various settings. They are supportive of her. Her father is depicted in a domestic setting.

### Friendship

Tabitha is shown to have a best friend. Their interaction is significant; Tabitha is difficult to be around because of her initial reaction to the raincloud and, as a result, her best friend finds it challenging to be with her. One potential take-away from this is modelling for children that they are not obligated to be around others who are being grumpy or making them feel uncomfortable. At the same time, it is clear her that best friend is still affectionate toward her, and is just getting and giving a bit of space.

## SELLING POINTS:

- The story is about learning how to cope with challenges, not how to avoid them.
- Depicts independent problem solving.
- Features a father in a domestic setting as well as a male/female friendship.
- This story is fun yet relatable.
- Features metaphorical writing and imagery, allowing for interpretation and a sense of self-satisfaction for child readers.

## AUTHOR MOTIVATION:

Tabitha is having the kind of day that we all have... most of us will have these days many times over! And even at the age of 33, with children of my own, I often need a reminder that it's not the challenge or the feeling, it's how I react or cope that can directly impact a positive resolution or outcome. I wish I'd realised this at a younger age. Tabitha is lucky; she may have awoken under a raincloud, but she also has the benefit of learning from it.

## WRITING STYLE:

This story is third-person limited; but don't let that fool you! Tabitha carries the day with her bold personality in this character-driven story. The writing/illustration combination is also metaphorical and interpretive. Is the rain cloud real, or is Tabitha just having a really crummy time of things?

Though the words are straightforward and relatively simple, the story is written in a way which is layered and allows for a hermeneutical interpretation. This, in turn, allows for a wonderful sense of accomplishment on the part of the child reader who is interpreting and putting together the events as they study the pictures in combination with reading and/or hearing the story.

There's also a bit of punnery and word play for a little extra fun!



# TEACHER NOTES: Tabitha and the Raincloud

## ILLUSTRATION STYLE:

Collage illustration, utilising recycled teabags, serviettes, gift wrapping and paper coffee cups. To finish off the pieces, mixed media is added to each collage.

## AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR BACKGROUND:

### Devon Sillett, Author

Devon Sillett is currently completing her PhD which focuses on diversity and gender in Australian children's picture books. She also holds a BA Comms (Journalism), BA Arts (Hons) and a Grad. Dip. Ed. She is currently an English teacher for high school and a college teacher in the ACT, and has previously taught in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra. This is Devon's fourth picture book. In addition to writing and teaching, Devon has the privilege of spending her days with her two most favourite people in the whole world, sons Aaron and Jay.

### Melissa Johns, Illustrator

Melissa Johns is an artist and illustrator from Northeast Victoria who creates artwork using recycled papers on canvas and paper. Her passion is children's artwork and education, particularly with regard to environmental awareness. Her works range from naïve and whimsical to contemporary, all with a vintage feel due to the recycled teabags used in every piece. Melissa has won several art awards and is the Director of Art Gallery on Ovens, a gallery in Northeast Victoria. Melissa and her husband are raising twin 13 year old sons who think they are 18.

## INTERVIEW:

### AUTHOR

#### What is the inspiration for this story?

The inspiration is two-fold. For starters, it is as simple as having an idea: what if someone woke up with a literal raincloud thundering over them as they try to go about their day? This presents amusing plot opportunities, but still plenty of room for lessons for the main character to learn (without veering into condescending, didactic territory).

It was also the realisation that one of the most challenging lessons to learn, for children and adults alike, is that it is not always easy to get rid of a problem. Sometimes, the most significant part of an experience is our actions and choices in response to a problem, as opposed to the problem itself.

#### What was the most rewarding part of this project?

As with my previous books, the most rewarding part of this project was seeing how my publisher and the illustrator would bring my initial vision to life, while also bringing in their own ideas and vision. This always results in an entirely equitable and collaborative creation. It is immensely rewarding to see such talented ideas come together to produce a final product which, in this case, is *Tabitha and the Raincloud*. For this story, it is also rewarding seeing a strong and determined female protagonist hit the bookshelves!



### INTERVIEW (cont.):

#### What was the most challenging part of this project?

Producing a character who was a total grump (at least initially), but who was also relatable and likeable. I don't want my readers to feel put-off by her yucky mood but, at the same time, Tabitha is only human. Therefore, she needs the space to have a bad day without worrying what readers will think of her!

### ILLUSTRATOR

#### What media do you use to create your illustrations? Briefly describe your process.

Recycled papers are the predominant media used, and recycled teabags are used in all of my artworks and illustrations. Added to these are the outside of coffee cups, wrapping paper, gift bags and serviettes. Once all of the paper pieces have been collaged in place, I add all of the finer details.

#### What was the most rewarding part of this project?

Using my imagination to tell the author's story and at times expanding on the story where it's allowed – for instance, having Tabitha's cloud darken and grow throughout the book.

#### What was the most challenging part of this project?

What I found most challenging was the formatting and flow of the artwork. As my pieces take several week to complete, I sometimes find it difficult to maintain the flow of images from page to page, especially if they are not created in order of the story. In Tabitha I created the cover and third page first, then started with the bedroom scenes before going onto the school scenes. It was a matter of keeping the scenes consistent.

## TEACHER ACTIVITIES

### Connecting to prior knowledge

#### Before Reading – What can we learn from a single picture?

- As a class, examine the front cover of *Tabitha and the Raincloud*. Then, utilising a combination of the title and visual clues, have students undertake a think-pair-share activity; students should piece together what they think the story is about. Students can either draw or write their predictions so they can refer back to them at the conclusion of the story. They should use specific examples and reasoning as justification.
- What sort of character do you imagine Tabitha will be? Is she nice? Outgoing? Silly? Fun? Again, students should provide justification for their reasoning.
- Ask students to describe the colour scheme in age appropriate language. What do the colours communicate to the reader and how do they do this? E.g. The greys and browns tell us that the mood within the story might not be all that bright, but the colour in Tabitha's name in the title show us that there is going to be fun somewhere along the way.

### Character Development Through Action and Experience (Cause and Effect)

- Have students discuss the sequence of events which occur in the story, focusing in particular on the events wherein Tabitha is directly impacted by the raincloud (e.g. soggy breakfast, misinterpreted art in art class etc.).
- Have students discuss how Tabitha reacts to each of these events, and what the result of that decision and action is.

### Metaphor – what's that?

- Define the word 'metaphor' for students (utilising age-appropriate language). Next, break down and analyse the meaning of the raincloud in the story. (Note: the intended metaphor is that the raincloud symbolises Tabitha's yucky mood. However, other appropriate interpretations are always welcome!)
- What other metaphors can students think of that they have seen, heard, or read?
- Have students illustrate or articulate their own metaphor for having a bad day!

### Relationships

- Identify all of Tabitha's relationships which are depicted in the story, and how each of the people in these relationships are affected by Tabitha's raincloud.
- Explore: Why are others affected by the raincloud if it is only raining on Tabitha?



## TEACHER NOTES: Tabitha and the Raincloud

### Relationships (cont.)

- Ask students: have they ever had days where their own metaphorical raincloud affected those around them? Have they had days where they were affected by the rainclouds of others?
- Using their answers for question 3, ask students to draw or write about this experience. Next, have them identify: was there a positive solution? If so, what was it? If not, what could they suggest for the next time this sort of challenge arises?

### Responding to Tabitha:

- Do you like Tabitha? Why or why not? Justify your answer.
- List the sorts of emotions that Tabitha might be feeling as she goes about her day (e.g. sad, grumpy, frustrated, upset).
- Ask students if they understand why Tabitha behaves the way she is behaving. Next, unpack:
  - a) Would you have responded the same or differently if you woke up with a raincloud above you?
  - b) If differently, what might have you done instead?
- How did this story make you feel? Use emotion words and explain why you think you felt this way.
- - a) List the sorts of emotions which Tabitha might be feeling at the conclusion of the story (e.g. happy, excited, relieved, sleepy).
  - b) What accounts for this change in Tabitha's feelings? (e.g. Tabitha decided to try to find a solution which helped her cope with her challenging situation and, as a result, things seem brighter and more optimistic).
  - c) Are any of the words used to answer question 5 opposites to those listed for question 2? Explain why this might be the case.

### Interpretation and Illustration:

What do the illustrations tell us that the words don't? Find examples where we learn additional information about Tabitha and her day from the illustrations.

### Choices:

- Ask students if they learned anything from Tabitha and her choices throughout the story.
  - a) Does she always make the best choice?
  - b) Does she find a solution in the end? If so, what was it, and how did this change in approach affect Tabitha and those around her?

*Suggestion: Explain to students that although Tabitha does not always make the right choice, she is only human, and it is her perseverance and eventual willingness to find a solution that is significant.*



## TEACHER NOTES: Tabitha and the Raincloud

### After reading:

- a) Ask students to revisit their initial ideas about the story; how close were they in guessing what the story is about?
- b) Ask students to explore and justify; do they like the conclusion of this story? Why or why not? If they didn't, how might they improve it? What would they change and why?

### Art:

Tabitha draws a dinosaur that looks like a giraffe. A giraffasaur! Can you think of a fun hybrid (the mix of two animals) which you can create and paint or draw?

### Activity:

This story is in **third-person**. This means it is written using the personal pronouns 'she', 'he', 'they', and 'them' instead of 'me', 'I', 'we', and 'us'.

Ask students to compose a diary or journal entry from Olivia's point of view in the **first-person** about the day she wakes up with a raincloud storming above her.

One suggested start for their entry:

'Dear Diary,  
Today was not my best day ever... '



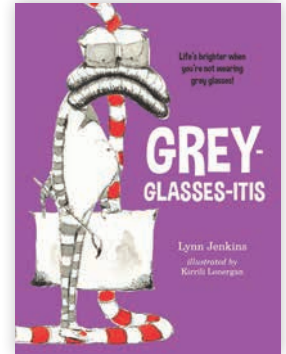
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